

THEOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY

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The Evangelical Task in the Modern University

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One in a series of essays
prepared for the University Divinity School Project
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Introduction

In the 1980s a creative group of North American theological educators opened a new chapter in a story that has stretched over nearly 200 years. They sought fresh answers to a question that had confronted their predecessors since the early 19th century: "What is the distinctive work of the theological school?" In the course of their work during the last decade, these educators gradually developed an extensive and often suggestive body of writings about the aims and purposes of theological education. Some of the most gifted leaders in this enterprise were faculty members at university divinity schools.

Interestingly, however, this literature included little about the particular vocation of the university-related theological school. Indeed, no generation of 20th-century educators has attempted to address the topic. Now, thanks to the support of the Lilly Endowment for the work of the University Divinity School Project, a new set of resources will be available to university leaders and divinity school faculty as they contemplate the future of this important institution in the 21st century.

The publications of the project will offer several perspectives on this subject. Conrad Cherry has written the first comprehensive account of the university divinity school and its history over the last 100 years. In his new work, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools and American Protestantism*, Cherry explains how the pressures of American history in the 20th century have eroded older, often unstated, but nevertheless powerful definitions of the divinity schools' vocation in both the universities and the larger society. The character and influence of these schools, which could once be taken for granted, appear today to belong to a rapidly receding past.

The final report of the project, *Theology in the University: A Study of University-Related Divinity Schools*, is another source of information about these schools. In it, the director of the project, James L. Waits, outlines the challenges facing the divinity school in the university today and urges a new and participatory citizenship on the

part of faculty, administrators, and students. An analysis of some of the more persistent issues facing these institutions (issues such as faculty development, administrative leadership, student admissions, financial and other resources) is also undertaken. The challenges outlined in this study are both difficult and energizing for the future viability of theology in the university.

Another resource is this series of essays. Each of these essays poses thoughtful questions and intriguing arguments that should figure in the coming conversations about the future of the university divinity schools. They represent important claims about the mission and vocation of these institutions. Here are eight voices that deserve to be heard in the days ahead:

The Divinity School in the University:

A Distinctive Institution

Martin E. Marty

University Divinity Schools: Their Advantages

James M. Gustafson

The Evangelical Task in the Modern University

George M. Marsden

The Theological Work of the University Scholar

Joseph C. Hough, Jr.

Toward the Integrated Study of Religion in the University

Ronald F. Thiemann

The Moral Purpose of the University

James T. Laney

Institutional Revitalization:

Leadership, Process, and Providence

Larry Jones

A Failure of Leadership?

Globalization and the University Divinity School

Judith A. Berling

These essays were edited by Robert W. Lynn, former Senior Vice President of the Lilly Endowment, and James L. Waits, Executive Director of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. They are produced as part of the University Divinity School Project, initiated by the Lilly Endowment in 1988.

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He is the author of numerous books including *The Soul of the American University* (1994) and *The Secularization of the Academy* (1992). He has written chapters for books and articles on subjects that include Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, American culture, religion, politics, and cultural pluralism.

He received a four-year grant from the J. Howard Pew Freedom Trust for a project on "The Religious and the Secular in Modern America" (1988-92). He serves as a referee for the Pew Scholars' Program and the Woodrow Wilson Center. He also serves on the advisory council for the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals.

The Evangelical Task in the Modern University

GEORGE M. MARSDEN

Evangelical Christianity coexists uneasily with the modern American university. Though many students and scattered numbers of faculty are evangelicals, universities allow little room for overt evangelical expressions, except in their toleration of voluntary organizations such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship or Campus Crusade. Occasionally there is outright hostility to evangelical perspectives. For instance, some religion departments are loath to hire known evangelicals, and some members of such departments are particularly hostile to evangelical perspectives in their teaching. Ridicule of viewpoints that might not be tolerated toward Catholics and that would bring expulsion were they expressed regarding Jews is often accepted regarding evangelicals. In response, most evangelicals at universities keep quiet about their religious views so far as their academic life is concerned.

Part of the problem in gaining a place for evangelical outlooks in universities has to do with the ambiguous character of evangelical identity. Evangelicalism is a loose grouping of Christians who regard the Bible as the highest religious authority and who hold some version of a traditionalist Protestant view of personally appropriated regeneration through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. This is a wide category, embracing a bewildering number of subtraditions, some of which differ widely from one another.¹ So in academia we should expect to find evangelicals of many different types. Just regarding the field of contemporary systematic theology alone, Gabriel Fackre identifies at least six evangelical subsets as "Old evangelicals, new evangelicals, justice and peace evangelicals, charismatic evangelicals, fundamentalists, and ecumenical evangelicals."² Each of these could be broken down into several subcategories and then divided by denominational and ethnic traditions. Still more could be added if we count the many African Americans who qualify

as evangelicals, even if they do not use the term as a self-reference. Yet in university settings such subtleties are usually lost. "Evangelical" is most often used as equivalent to fundamentalist or charismatic, and the term conjures up images of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim and Tammy Fay Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, aggressive Campus Crusaders, or anti-abortion, anti-women, anti-gay activists.

Obviously, then, there is no one task for evangelicals in the university. Differing subgroups view their tasks in widely differing ways. Many evangelicals view the universities as essentially hostile environments; they see much of university teaching as to be condemned, and they urge students either to stay away from secular universities or to remain as separate as possible except when evangelizing. At another extreme are many evangelicals who are, in effect, pragmatic dualists who keep their faith separate from many aspects of their intellectual life and hence see no problem with the universities in their present form. Between these two extremes, one can find almost every variation on the spectrum.

Our question then focuses on the more moderate evangelicals on that spectrum who wish to participate in secular universities and who take their academic task seriously. Presumably this is the group in view when one speaks of an evangelical task in the university.

Probably their first task is to clean up their image. The most tempting way to do that would be to drop the term "evangelical" entirely because of the negative images it suggests. "Classic Christian" or "classic Protestant" might be preferable terms that would signal the intention of most such evangelicals to define themselves in terms of a broader Christian heritage that does not accentuate all the peculiarities of American revivalism of the past 200 years. Such terminology also suggests that they are ready to make common cause with Catholics and other more-or-less traditional Christians who, despite other important theological differences, share similar concerns to relate the spiritual to the academic.

In any case, what should be the task of such Christians? My answer reflects the outlook of the tradition with which I identify. That is the Reformed tradition which has said that the Christian's calling is to relate one's faith to all aspects of life, including all areas of scholarship. Hence the task of the Christian in the university is not

simply to be a model spiritual person who worships and works in a Christian community, as essential as those tasks are. It is not simply to witness to the gospel, though that is at least a tacit part of every calling. But faithfulness to God in a specifically academic vocation also calls for one to attempt to integrate one's faith with one's academic discipline. That duty applies not only in subjects of traditional theological curricula but in all subjects that bear on Christian life.

Especially during the past 30 years or so, this enterprise of relating evangelical Christian perspectives to various disciplines has established a considerable academic base, especially in the network of Christian colleges associated with the Christian College Coalition, in evangelical academic organizations, and in numerous publications.³ In my view, one important next step is to relate such perspectives to the secular university setting.

The obstacles to such an enterprise in the contemporary university setting are best understood in the context of the history of the relationship of evangelical Christianity to the American university. Evangelicalism is one of the progenitors of the American university, but it is viewed by its offspring as an uneducated, obscurantist, and stern grandparent whose narrow-minded views are not worth the time of day. Because evangelicalism is what higher education has been freed from, almost anything is more tolerable than a return to its influences. In fact, modern universities came to be defined in ways that excluded such parochialism.

Most major American universities were preceded by evangelical colleges. Until about 1870, the typical American college was a modest affair consisting of only about 100 to 500 students. The private colleges were controlled by churches or boards of clergy, and even the state institutions usually had clergymen as presidents. The curriculum was built around recitations of Greek and Latin classics with a few modern subjects added. The college presidents usually taught a capstone course in "moral philosophy" that related Christian principles to personal and public life. Daily chapel was required, as was Sunday church attendance.

Although such schools were dominated by evangelical Protestants, they saw themselves as public institutions in the sense of providing American culture with its properly normative ideals. They had a frankly evangelistic purpose of promoting the ideals of evangelical Christian culture. Many of the colleges in the West originated as home missionary efforts. Throughout the country, almost all the leading Protestant colleges proclaimed themselves as “non-sectarian,” meaning only that they did not insist on any one denominational version of evangelical Protestantism.

In order to bring about the many reforms needed to turn such schools into modern universities, the old system had to be dismantled. Conservative clergy often had a large stake in preserving the old classical system and the rigid control of students that went with it. Furthermore, as American culture modernized, the exclusivist claims of evangelical Protestantism (which, after all, made a distinction between the saved and the lost) became an embarrassment as a basis for supposedly non-sectarian public institutions. At the same time, a related intellectual crisis in Western culture undermined confidence in the Bible as an authority in the sense traditionally held by Protestants. The result was that those who built American universities broadened the meaning of their Protestant heritages, offering an inclusivist liberal Protestantism as an underlying basis for their enterprise. Liberal Protestantism affirmed the highest ideals realized in the progress of civilization itself. By standing for Christian morality as the basis for democratic and progressive capitalist ideals, it offered a rationale for retaining Protestant hegemony while at the same time building public institutions.

The best in American civilization, which the universities saw themselves as representing, could thus be seen as an outgrowth of what they considered the best of Protestantism. Especially they saw the ideal of freedom as a major Protestant contribution to civilization, realized most notably in the American Revolution and in freeing the slaves during the Civil War. In the “Whig” Protestant American mythology, Protestant ideals of freedom, which led to such advances in civilization, were contrasted with Catholic authoritarianism and superstition. These ideals had been a strong

part of the ideology of the American Revolution and were prominent in both the Whig and the Republican ideologies before the Civil War. Republicans, who emerged as politically and culturally dominant after the Civil War, were the principal shapers of the universities. They combined Protestant-Whig ideals of freedom with capitalist expansion for which modernized universities could be a valuable asset.

Modern scientific ideals, which played a crucial role in defining the new universities, were an important part of this mythology, because science (for which Protestant civilization claimed much of the credit) was one of the chief expressions of freedom from authoritarianism. In pre-Civil War America, evangelical Protestants themselves had been in the forefront of championing the scientific ideal of free inquiry. Blending Enlightenment and Protestant ideals, evangelicals had been convinced that scientific method would confirm biblical authority. Liberal Protestants and secularists in the post-Civil War era turned science against the traditional authority of the Bible. Darwinism came to symbolize this struggle. As Cornell founder Andrew Dickson White, for instance, emphasized in *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), traditional evangelical belief in the Bible was just the sort of freedom-denying authoritarianism that was to be deplored. It was as bad as authoritarian Catholicism. Anti-Catholicism was taken for granted in the Protestant culture that shaped the universities.

The modern universities thus eliminated the embarrassments of their recent evangelical heritages by defining themselves as scientific institutions and by defining science in a way that excluded reliance on any traditional religious authority, such as the Bible. In order to be able to claim universality, science was defined according to the Enlightenment principle that it should be free from outside influences. Furthermore this principle was taken to mean specifically that for anything to qualify as a science, it had to follow naturalistic premises that seemed to work so well in natural and technical sciences. Hence, by its very definition, science was to be conducted with no reference to the preconceptions of authoritarian traditions, at least not religious or politically defined traditions.

This extension of the Protestant emphasis on freedom now excluded not only authoritarian Catholicism but also traditional views of the authority of the Bible. The Bible still was revered by liberal Protestants as a proven source of inspiring moral truths on which everyone could agree—but its theological and its historical claims were accepted only in so far as they could pass the tests of naturalistic history and science.

Those who shaped American universities in the late 19th century were almost all liberal Protestants who adopted such views. They were fighting their own battles against biblical authoritarianism, which sometimes was used as a weapon to support an unthinking dogmatism that opposed all sorts of innovation. Liberal Protestants saw their own outlook by contrast as “scientific,” particularly in its openness to higher criticism of Scripture, but also in its hailing of scientific progress generally as part of the unfolding of the Kingdom of God. Science and the scientific method, defined as free inquiry inhibited by no preconceptions, were thus simply manifestations of Christian civilization. Whatever universities did to advance such an outlook was thus implicitly Christian. “The ultimate end of all educational and scientific effort,” Daniel Coit Gilman, the founder of Johns Hopkins University, assured an audience of liberal Protestant leaders in 1887, “. . . is identical with that at which Christianity aims . . . , ‘Peace on earth, good-will to men.’ ”⁴

The liberal Protestant builders of the universities could thus retain the missionary zeal of their evangelical predecessors, and it is no mere coincidence that the rise of the new universities coincided with the heyday of American foreign missions and the Student Volunteer Movement’s ideal of “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” While many of the overseas missionaries themselves retained something of traditional evangelical particularism, the broader spirit of the cultural mission of the university was more universal in scope. Truly liberal Protestants and post-Protestant secularists did not need to be embarrassed by what would later be denigrated as imperialism because their cultural imperialism was, in their view, only sharing the best with those who lacked it. The universities were home missions, fostering a cultural imperialism at

home closely parallel to the goals of liberal Protestant foreign missions of proclaiming universally valid Christian principles of freedom, democracy, and justice to the whole world. As in the case of all successful missions, traditional cultures and their religions suffered. So on the home front, the proselytizing for the ideal of scientifically based democratic culture involved a program of deprecating traditional biblicist Protestantism and its cultural influence.

Essential to the definition of modern American universities, then, was an outlook that specifically excluded the traditional evangelical Protestantism that had dominated American higher education two generations earlier. By the 1920s, such exclusion was nearly complete, at least in leading institutions. Liberal Protestantism had also cleared the way for the growth of a more secular version of its cultural ideals. By the 1950s, American universities stood for science, technology, and democratic ideals of the Western heritage, vaguely tied to the "Judeo-Christian heritage."

This consensus is what collapsed in the 1960s. Since then, advocates of a new pluralism have challenged the adequacy of any consensus of beliefs that everyone should be expected to share. Intellectually this attack has included an assault even on the sanctity of the supposed objectivity of the natural sciences themselves. Traditional verities in other fields have likewise been deconstructed. Not incidentally these attacks have been connected with the attack on the old White Anglo Male Protestant (WAMP) establishment.⁵

What is the best response to these historical circumstances in which evangelical perspectives were largely excluded from modern universities, but now the original reasons for such exclusion have come under attack?

The answer depends, of course, on one's point of view. Many secularists, for instance, will simply welcome the exclusion. Let us presume, however, that in this paper we are addressing two primary audiences: mainline (or oldline) ecumenical Protestants (that is, those for whom a major identifying trait would be their sympathies for the goals of the National Council of Churches) and evangelicals.

Ecumenical Protestants are the heirs of those from the old mainline denominations who played a major role in American universities during the first half of the 20th century and still retain a privileged, though somewhat vestigial, place at a number of private universities because they control the university divinity schools. During the first half of the 20th century, the leadership of mainline Protestantism was largely hostile to conservative evangelicals whom they identified, often correctly, with the fundamentalist movement and hence with hostility to the liberal version of free inquiry characteristic of universities. During almost the entire century, avowed evangelicals have been vastly underrepresented on the faculties of university divinity schools.

One way to redefine the evangelical task in universities would be for ecumenical Protestants to reassess, as they currently seem to be doing, their relationship to evangelicals. Such reassessment involves discriminating among types of evangelicals, rather than identifying them all with the fundamentalist camp. It also involves recognizing that as various types of evangelicalism produce second and third generations, they are changing, often broadening, especially with respect to tolerating Christian diversity.

Ecumenical Protestants and some evangelical Protestants might be seen as natural allies in university settings, even though some of their basic beliefs about the nature of Christianity might be widely at odds. Particularly they might be allies in taking a stand for the point that there is room in the academy for perspectives informed by particular religious traditions. When the modern university was defined, the highest authority was ascribed to science. Free inquiry based on the scientific method, it was assumed, would produce conclusions that all right thinking people should agree upon. As we have seen, liberal Protestants who shaped the university endorsed this view of science as an extension of the highest Protestant principles. Moreover, they could justify a continued role for a Christian presence in the universities on the grounds that the new liberal Protestantism, "scientific modernism" as it was sometimes called, was both truly open and truly scientific. Christianity, rightly understood as a divinely inspired highest ethic, would vindicate itself

in a free market as the apex of human expression, the culmination of an ongoing cultural progress toward the realization of an ideal.

One problem with this rationale, of course, was that as John Dewey and others demonstrated, if modern science and a socially derived ethical ideal were the highest authorities, one could do as well or better at achieving such ideals without the encumbrances of the Christian heritage. The ethic of a truly pluralistic society, in fact, would seem to exclude any particular religious claims. Liberal Protestants could accommodate to this insight by virtually eliminating Christian particularities. But as the neo-orthodox critics pointed out by the 1930s, such a course would also lead to the extinction of the need for the church, and hence for divinity schools, altogether.

The generation of neo-orthodoxy and chastened liberalism in the middle decades of the century strengthened the quest for a distinct Christian identity at major divinity schools, though it did not resolve the fundamental issues involved. Since the 1960s, the rise of liberation causes and advocacy scholarship has provided divinity schools with representatives of Christian versions of agendas that are popular in much of the rest of the academy, hence helping to legitimate a continuing religious presence in universities. In the meantime, however, what little substantive ecumenical Protestant presence there had been elsewhere within universities diminished. Religion departments often grew, but usually under the banner of "the scientific study of religion" that tended to eliminate or to undermine the substantive claims of any particular religion.

Some ecumenical Protestants may welcome these developments; others, particularly the heirs to American neo-orthodoxy, may believe that the time has come to begin to retrieve a more distinct Christian presence in the universities. They may recognize that particular Christian concerns have been virtually excluded from universities, except at divinity schools. They furthermore might recognize that in this regard they have more in common with the concerns of evangelicals, whose viewpoints have long been all but excluded from major universities, than they do with more secular viewpoints. Furthermore, they might recognize that much of the enthusiasm for restoring a distinctly Christian presence in universi-

ties is found among educated evangelicals, particularly those who are populating many graduate programs in religion, philosophy, and related disciplines.

A first step would be for ecumenical Protestants to encourage more than a token evangelical presence at university divinity schools. The substantial presence of other major Christian groups should be encouraged as well; some effort might be made to bring the staffing of divinity schools more into line with the proportions of the religious communities that universities serve.

One of the difficulties in implementing such a strategy, however, is that it is problematic whether divinity schools and universities would be open to the right wing of the evangelical movement. Even if university communities were tolerant of aggressive intellectual defenses of conservative theological views, they would probably find more practical difficulty with the political and social view of such groups, especially views on issues of gender and sexuality that are antagonistic to dominant academic viewpoints. Theoretically, such widely popular conservative religious outlooks should be represented in institutions that claim to serve a broad public. Realistically, current restrictions on free speech and academic freedom in universities may in practice exclude expressions of such views. Nonetheless, steps toward more inclusive representation would be made if, at least the more moderate evangelicals (or stricter evangelicals who are willing to “behave”) were welcomed into the fold.

Particularly important to recognize in this regard is that while political reasons for excluding some evangelicals may persist, the intellectual grounds for the original exclusion of evangelical theology have largely collapsed. When the American university was defined as a haven for free scientific inquiry, it was believed that such inquiry would lead toward intellectual consensus. There was, it was widely assumed, one science for all people. Moreover, it was also widely held that there was one higher morality emerging in the ideals of the highest civilization. Liberal university people could not always agree on the details of such a civilizing morality, but they were largely agreed that there was such an ideal. All persons ought to be

assimilated into it. At first these scientific and civilizing ideals were usually designated as a higher Christianity. During the 20th century, they were more often presented as the ideals of democracy or liberalism.

Today such beliefs about science and morality, beliefs that were so fundamental to the definition of a university, seem no longer viable. It has become widely held that one implication of the naturalistic-scientific world view on which the universities were founded is that all moral claims, including those most dear to liberal culture, are community-relative. Hence, within universities there seems to be no common ground on which to adjudicate claims between conflicting communities or constituencies. Even natural science itself, except in its technical applications, is seen to be dependent on community-generated paradigms. Contested issues cannot therefore be settled by an appeal to neutral common standards. Particularly on questions of morality, where group interests are concerned, the universities are being turned from havens for dispassionate inquiry into the opposite—arenas for the clashes of contending political interests. This was the message of the student rebellions of the 1960s: that intellectual life is ultimately politics. In subsequent decades this message has become institutionalized, much to the alarm not only of cultural conservatives but of many of the liberal old guard as well.⁶

The crisis in the universities may open a window of opportunity for more-or-less traditional Christians, either ecumenical or moderate evangelical. First, they ought to recognize that it would be a mistake simply to get caught up in the political debates and to identify fully with one side or the other. On the one hand, they may share some of the concerns of the cultural conservatives who fear that the radical critiques will undermine some societal values that may have been widely beneficial. Christians may be particularly concerned with the degree to which the attack on the West, the attack on the authority of all texts and canons, and the attack on many traditional moral values is an implicit or explicit attack on the Christian heritage itself. On the other hand, they ought also to have a measure of agreement with the campus radicals. Such agreement

should be based first of all on the degree to which genuine questions of justice are involved in some radical critiques of the liberal Western tradition (although there is no reason to assume that all the justice is on one side in this debate.) Radical deconstructionists and the like⁷ have successfully pointed to the impossibility of a compelling intellectual defense of Western liberal values on purely naturalistic terms. As many of their critics have pointed out, they themselves have no better basis for reconstructing a moral basis for human social relationships, but at least they have performed a service by carrying modern Western thought to its *reductio ad absurdum*. As Charles Taylor has argued in his influential *Sources of the Self*, modern people generally lack any adequate intellectual ground on which to defend their beliefs about benevolence and justice which they hold most dear.⁸

This crisis in the universities and the wider moral crisis in the culture that it reflects provide the context and opportunity for Christians to define a new task for themselves. One essential component of such a definition is that it must reflect a post-imperialistic or post-Constantinian Christianity. Throughout most of the history of the American universities, Christianity has played a priestly role. As the great chapels on campuses suggest architecturally, the function of Christianity has been largely to pronounce its blessings on whatever the universities stand for. University divinity schools have often played such roles as well. Even since the 1960s, when it has been difficult to sustain any other distinct Christian presence in university-sponsored activities, divinity schools have typically endorsed the multicultural and advocacy ideals that have the most popular causes in the rest of academia. This is not to say that these were not worthy causes or that they did not have important principles shaping their stances. Functionally, however, the role of the divinity schools has been much the same as it has been throughout the 20th century—to provide Christian versions of dominant academic opinion.

There is even some danger of doing this in the current theologies that emphasize the distinctiveness of the Christian community as being defined by a narrative and a moral discourse that sets it apart

from other communities. This insight is a valuable one, but it loses much of its real distinctiveness if it is grounded on an epistemology that is based simply on the assumptions of current secular pragmatist or deconstructionist thought. If we accept as our starting point that reality is created by communities and their narratives, then we are thereby forsaking those aspects of our narrative that insist that human communities do not create reality but that it is revealed to them by God. Especially truths about God's triune nature, the human predicament, God's moral standards, and God's plan of salvation in Christ are not simply community creations (though our understanding of them contains elements of that); they are truths that transcend particular human communities.

On the other hand, the important contribution of such theologies is that they attempt to cultivate a sense that Christians are outsiders to the power structures of the world. Modern Christianity, they recognize, must be post-Constantinian. Nonetheless, the proponents of such views would be more consistent were they to apply their principles more thoroughly with respect to the academic and intellectual powers as well as to the political powers.

Evangelicalism, in so far as it reflects classic Christianity and not simply sanctified American cultural ideals, may have something to offer in cultivating this sense of a post-Constantinian Christianity. Having been excluded from many centers of cultural power for nearly a century, some classic Christians in the evangelical camp have reflected on the value of the outsiders' role. In recent decades they have been particularly critical of the tendencies of many other evangelicals to aspire to be simply American insiders. Much of the criticism of evangelicalism arising from within has focused on the confusions of evangelicalism with American cultural values and has suggested ways that evangelicals might cultivate a sense that their commitments to classic Christianity separate them from past as well as present versions of dominant American values.⁹

From my own point of view, one of the hopeful developments in the evangelical academic community has been the spread of a sophisticated epistemology that addresses these issues.¹⁰ This viewpoint, emerging broadly from the thought of the Dutch theologian

Abraham Kuyper emphasizes the presuppositional character of basic religious commitments, whether to classic Christianity, secular philosophies, or other religions. So beliefs, such as belief in the Triune God revealed in Scripture, must be the organizing paradigms for Christian thought, not beliefs that are argued from a supposedly neutral position.¹¹ This outlook thus anticipates much of 20th century thought in rejecting the Enlightenment faith in a universal science. It also rejects, however, the notion, common since Kant, that human minds (or communities) create the only reality they can know. Rather it asserts that the correct paradigm for interpreting reality includes a belief in a Creator God, whose creation includes moral law,¹² who has revealed the divine plan of salvation to humans who are both morally defective and (as many modern epistemologies in effect agree) incapable on their own of finding the truth about the universe and themselves.

Part of the evangelical task in the university, then, ought to be to create conditions in which such 20th-century versions of classic Christian viewpoints might be represented in university curricula. Proponents of such viewpoints do not claim that everyone in the university will agree with them or that their views should hold a privileged position to be imposed on everyone. Rather they recognize that there is no universal science and that a variety of intellectually responsible positions ought to be considered in university settings. Such views might have some special claim to consideration in American universities because of the substantial Christian constituency that supports the universities. Nonetheless, proponents of such views would recognize that theirs were minority viewpoints. Affirming that Christianity is at its best in its post-Constantinian varieties, their only goal in a public university should be to gain a hearing.

Such a program should involve moving on a number of fronts. One goal, crucially important in the long run, should be that Christian perspectives be included among the options in graduate study. This would involve not only having serious Christians included on graduate faculties, as has sometimes been the case already,

but also consciousness-raising among such Christians that they ought to be relating their Christianity to their academic work. Many serious Christians, trained in the ethos of the myth of objectivism of the modern university, still believe that it would be illicit explicitly to relate their Christianity to their academic work. Helping such academics to recognize the flimsy basis for such viewpoints could be an important first step into introducing Christian options in graduate education. Perhaps what is most needed for such work are supporting communities of Christians in university settings, study centers, organizations of Christian graduate students, and the like, which would encourage such Christian consciousness.

Such programs could be particularly important in the long run because substantially increased numbers of graduate students have been coming from evangelical communities.¹³ Evangelicals thus might constitute an important component among university faculties of the next generation. Their presence, however, is not likely to count much for Christianity unless the current generation of graduate students is trained in approaching their subjects from Christian perspectives. Otherwise the anti-religious mythos that has defined the universities is likely to remain unchallenged.

The option of Christian perspectives ought to be available in undergraduate education as well. This would have to be accomplished primarily by individual instructors who are willing to be open about their own perspectives. Such approaches must be handled with care and are best presented, especially at state universities, as a matter of truth in advertising, in which one is honest enough to reveal one's point of view, without requiring that others adopt it.

Any such activity would have to be conducted within a framework of encouraging representation of other major religious positions as well within the universities. So, for instance, a university that allowed courses in which traditional Christian perspectives were admitted might well also have a center for Jewish studies, where it might be presumed that teachers would be largely sympathetic to Judaism and the state of Israel. Similarly there might be a center for Islamic studies.

Serious questions remain as to whether these measures would be both viable and adequate. First of all, they may invite insurmountable opposition within the university communities themselves. American public life may depend so much on the illusion of consensus¹⁴ that even private universities may not tolerate explicit religious perspectives unless they innocuously fit in with beliefs already deemed acceptable in the academic community. At state institutions, the situation is even more delicate because secularists and religious minorities fear, with some legitimacy, anything that hints at the reinstitution of dominance by the Christian majority.

Even if the above suggestions could be implemented, they could be regarded as only one step in fulfilling the traditionalist Christian task with respect to the modern university. If it is true that intellectual traditions are sustained largely by their communities and their institutions, then it is problematic whether Christian intellectual life can long remain healthy if it is largely dependent on institutions defined overwhelmingly by forces alien to the Christian gospel.

What may be needed in addition is the building of independent Christian universities. Such institutions would not have to duplicate everything that secular universities do, especially in technical areas, but they should provide communities in which Christian intellectual life can be sustained at the highest level. They should also offer graduate education that provides alternate perspectives not just in traditional theological disciplines, but also in all those pivotal disciplines that deal with the intersections of human faith and culture.

It may take some years for Protestants to manage to build such institutions that have enough academic credibility to compete with secular universities. Nonetheless, so far as Protestant traditionalism is concerned there are some respectable liberal arts colleges and theological seminaries that, with some expansion of their visions, might provide the basis for such alternatives.

If one takes seriously that Christianity is not only true, but that it should relate to all that one does, then the Christian task should extend to higher education, not only in witnessing against what is pretentious, false, and destructive in modern culture, but also in

providing alternatives that will help sustain Christian academic life, as one small, but sometimes vital, part of the work of the Body of Christ.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991) is notable among the many discussions of this issue.
2. Gabriel Fackre, "Reorientation and Retrieval in Systematic Theology," *Christian Century* 108 (June 26-July 3, 1991), 653.
3. George Marsden, "The State of Evangelical Scholarship," *Christian Scholar's Review* XVII: 4 (June 1988), 347-60, reviews such developments.
4. "Address by President D. C. Gilman, LL.D., of Baltimore," *National Perils and Opportunities: The Discussions of the . . . Evangelical Alliance for the United States* (New York: 1887), 281.
5. For a somewhat fuller overview of these developments, see the author's "The Soul of the American University" in George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
6. This was the theme of numerous books and articles published in 1990 and 1991. The best known is Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991). Among the reaction of liberals, see for instance, C. Vann Woodward, "Freedom and the Universities," *New York Review of Books*, July 18, 1991, 32-7, who cites several other expressions of liberal alarm at the curtailment of free speech in the new political atmosphere. Cf. also the section of essays on the topic in *The New Republic*, February 18, 1991.
7. Because deconstructionism has been so heavily attacked of late and its demise has been frequently proclaimed, it may now be difficult to find those who will own the term. Even at Duke University, where in the English Department and Program in Literature the term was recently in vogue, the announcement now comes that no one in those programs is a deconstructionist (in a strict sense). (Clyde de L. Ryals, letter to the editors, *New York Review of Books*, September 26, 1991, 75). Because the advocates of the view in question often describe it as largely a rhetorical strategy, this announcement is not entirely surprising.
8. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 515.

9. The strongest critiques have arisen in publications such as the magazines, *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*, or the writings of Ronald Sider, which have tended to speak from Anabaptist perspectives. More moderate Reformed critiques were found in the writers associated with the late *Reformed Journal* (absorbed into *Perspectives* in 1991).
10. See Marsden, "The State of Evangelical Scholarship."
11. See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).
12. See Richard Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).
13. This is based on impressionistic evidence and, as one might expect, seems particularly true in fields where major theoretical issues might be at stake, such as in religion, philosophy, history, and literature.
14. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) presents a valuable critique of this tendency.

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